

CONTEMPORARY ALTERNATIVE INDIAN CINEMA: TOWARDS A NEW FILM LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

*Contemporary cinema in India since the late 2000s spanning across several languages has found to occupy a new space of 'indie' or 'independent' in international film festival parlance and domestic circles of festivals, journalists and filmmakers themselves. Moving away from fixed genres and conventions of big-budget commercial cinema in the country, several filmmakers and production houses are either self-funding or producing films through collaboration with Indian or international funding. This paper looks at this trajectory in Indian cinema through the narratives and filming choices of the filmmakers through two case studies – the Punjabi language film called *Alms for the Blind Horse* (2011) and the Hindi language film *Autumn* (2010). Through these case studies, I employ textual analysis and interviews to argue that a certain legacy of the New Wave period of cinema in India during the late 60s to 80s is visible in the contemporary moment and filmmakers are exploring new ways to communicate local stories to the audiences nationally and internationally.*

KEYWORDS: *Indian Cinema, Cinema Studies, Experimental Cinema, Independent Cinema & Media Studies*

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INTRODUCTION

What stands out distinctively apart from mainstream commercial cinema in India are alternative cinematic practices that focus on form and style. Hence, to be able to understand the 'independent' in what is termed as 'indie' cinema today by several journalists, film festival programmers, producers, and filmmakers, it is important to analyze the visual form and the aesthetic choices that its filmmakers have undertaken to lend their unique visions to their ideas. In this paper, I lay emphasis on the form, the visual grammar and the notion of exploring the cinematic medium in different ways that contemporary film-makers have followed so as to achieve a deep, sensory and experiential quality of visuality. There is silence, rhythm and design in the films I will proceed to discuss and these filmmakers have chosen to tread away from the commercial mainstream industry conventions.

One of the parallels that have been made with such contemporary cinema is that of the New Wave period in Indian cinema beginning in the late 1960s and through the 70s and 80s. Ira Bhaskar considers that with the impact of global cinema on cinephile filmmakers, new formations have emerged which are different from the earlier period of the New Wave. She says, "At the same time, even at the end of a significant historical period, it is important to note that some influences persist" (2013:31). These influences are most visible in Marathi cinema and she argues that the "legacy of the experimental cinema" continues to reverberate in the films of Amit Dutta, Paresh Kamdar and Gurbinder Singh. Even if the New Wave movement was consumed by the 90s due to financial non-viability, "but it has yet left an important legacy of cinematic innovation and experimentation." Bhaskar concludes that "perhaps there is a genealogy here for the new, edgy experimental cinema of today" (ibid: 32). Amrit Gangar

makes similar connections while discussing the cinematographic qualities of the short films of contemporary filmmakers Amit Dutta, Ashish Avikunthak, Kabir Mohanty and Vipin Vijay. He elaborates that these young and “thinking artists” follow previous masters such as Mani Kaul, Kumar Shahani, and Kamal Swaroop among others (Gangar, 2010: 52). He argues that their ‘non-realist’ approaches and ‘temporal’ unities must have been influenced by Kaul, Shahani, Swaroop amongst other world influences (ibid: 61). The “rigor of austerity” that he locates in the cinema of Kaul and Shahani, he simultaneously observes in the works of these contemporary filmmakers who he thinks “look at cinematography as a radically different dispensation” (ibid: 61). Likewise, Ananya Parikh in her dissertation on narration in New Wave cinema concludes by linking young filmmakers who draw from the tradition of ‘experimental’ films of the 1970s, the chief being Amit Dutta as also Avikunthak, Ashim Ahluwalia and Shai Heredia. She says, “Their works explore some of the ideas that had already been established by the ‘experimental’ filmmakers in the 1970s and early 1980s” (Parikh, 2010: 126). I will consider these observations by analyzing the cinematic form of some of these filmmakers and others who continue to cite the New Wave legacy. I propose to take this assessment forward by discussing their cinema and argue that although placed within a history of the New Wave period and art cinema practice, they are altogether new explorations into film form and language.

New Wave Cinema and Contemporary

Within the writings on the New Wave itself, Mira Reym Binford pointed out that the New Cinema was not a single cohesive movement with a clearly articulated political or aesthetic ideology, but its filmmakers were linked by their rejection of commercial cinema’s style and themes. However, New Cinema’s dependence on the commercial industry for distribution and exhibition became a major obstacle in reaching wider audiences (1987:150). Further, formal and technical innovations also governed some films of the movement with the work of Mani Kaul and Kumar Shahani most consistently rejecting realism, experimenting with alternative narrative techniques and attempting to apply Indian aesthetic theories (153). Amrit Gangar has proposed a theory of the *Cinema of Prayoga* whereby he relinquishes the use of the word ‘experimental’ or ‘avant-garde’ to describe the cinematic language of filmmakers like Mani Kaul but uses Jain philosophy¹ to understand the use of time and space. *Cinema of Prayoga* for him implies the “creator’s own state, own temperament. It has the quality of being intuitive and congenial, capable of achieving a certain *bhavasandhi*, a unity of emotions in its characteristic manner” (2010: 18). Parikh in her work prefers to use the term modernism rather than ‘avant-garde’ to describe the poetics of Kaul and Shahani because of the “foregrounding of formal experimentation in their cinema, rather than their attempt to anarchically bring down bourgeois culture” (2010:20).² John Hood in his book on Indian art cinema describes an art cinema practice from the 60s onwards that is drawn from and influenced by other sources like the leftist and nationalist Indian People’s Theatre Movement (IPTA) of the 40s, the film society movements of the 50s, and the advent of international film festivals beginning with the festival held in Calcutta in 1952. According to him, while IPTA transformed political and social ideas into a cultural form, film societies and festivals helped future filmmakers like Ray and Ghatak watch international masters and contemporary filmmakers especially the Italian neo-realists, and the Soviet masters. For him, modern Indian art cinema thus lacks that which commercial cinema carries as a badge – songs and dances, melodrama, narrative predictability, and an established formula. He says, “Art cinema is free to experiment with form, style, and structure” (Hood, 2000:5). Bhaskar argues that the films of the New Wave period brought to the screen

¹Gangar employs a study of time and space as expressed in Jain philosophy and attempts to link such an exploration with the cinema of Mani Kaul and Deleuzian philosophy (Gangar, 2010: 23-35).

² She places their work within the Indian context of modernism, rather than the Western as theorized by Geeta Kapur and Partha Mitter and discusses their incorporation of traditional folk art forms in their cinematic practice (ibid:23).

cinematic experimentation and new forms of narration in the film along with cinematic realism of form and content (2013:19). Films like Mrinal Sen's *Bhuvan Shome* (1969) and Mani Kaul's *Uski Roti* (1969) were concerned with aesthetics on the one hand and the representation of social issues with an understanding of all their complexities and ambiguities and a drive to transform society on the other (ibid).

The New Wave films were extremely diverse, and ranged from realist portrayals of contemporary Indian reality, especially the reality of small town and village India to experimental and modernist work that foregrounded abstraction and stylization. (ibid: 20).

The cinema of the New Wave in its rejection of the commercial mainstream style was driven by what can be termed 'the realist project' which is not be equated with only cinematic realism but "one that is motivated by the drive to know and represent the world adequately" (ibid). Bhaskar says that the project inspired various aesthetic forms from realism to modernism, abstraction, experimental work and stylization to represent gender and caste relations and the oppressive structures of society. These films traveled in the festival and film society circuit where the movement built its reputation and its public face. But this circuit did not bring returns to pay back loans or earn profits, and with the absence of a viable distribution and exhibition structure, the movement soon petered out (ibid). Similar problems of exhibition plague the contemporary alternative filmmakers and the heritage of the cinema of the earlier period resound in their cinematic explorations today.

According to Agnitra Ghosh in his work on Bombay Cinephilia, the rise of the multiplex created a niche urban audience for unconventional smaller budget films and also allowed mainstream films to co-exist with niche ones of filmmakers like Anurag Kashyap and Sriram Raghavan (2010: 47). However, for many independent filmmakers, multiplexes have not really supported the exhibition of their films due to the rising costs of screening and the lack of corporate backing by big production houses and distribution companies for the same. But film festivals around the country have provided them with screening opportunities despite a lack of monetization. Some have also found limited release in the country by being noticed at these festivals. These include the International Film Festival of India (IFFI) run by the Directorate of Film Festivals (DFF) and state festivals across the country like the Kolkata Film Festival, the Kerala Film Festival, the Mumbai Film Festival organized by the Mumbai Academy of Moving Image (MAMI), the Osian's Film Festival (defunct after 2012), the Pune International Film Festival, the Chennai International Film Festival as well as new entrants like the Dharamsala International Film Festival and the Ladakh Film Festival. IFFI curates a selection of international and national films, and its Indian Panorama section is still the widest list of regional independent films produced in the country every year. Despite festivals being organized by their respective state governments and private sponsors, each festival retains a unique character that audiences flock to every year to enrich themselves with. Osians' with its focus on Asian and Arab cinema had seen a surge in its curation of Indian films produced independently in 2012. Some of these filmmakers have also found an exhibition on the art circuit with screenings in different museums as part of various art installations.

The comparison of recent independent films with the cinema of the New Wave can be made to the point that both carry a spirit of experimentation and a desire for new narrative styles. The New Wave period is a legacy that forms the backdrop of the movement of art cinema in the country and many contemporary filmmakers draw from this period, especially those who have been taught at FTII (Film and Television Institute of India), Pune. As with the established art cinema practice in the country, that of filmmakers like Adoor Gopalakrishnan, Shaji Karun and others in regional

languages, for the current filmmakers to their film projects have emerged from a conscious need to unravel film language, and in their own words they are still explorers yet to achieve their own form. I argue that they continue to carry forward a similar temperament in their unique explorations of film form but are different from the earlier period in terms of materiality. The films discussed in this paper are edgy, with rougher textures that draw their inspirations from the surreal and the traditional in the arts.

WINTER OF DISCONTENT: *ANHEY GHODE DA DAAN*(2011)

Anhey Ghode Da Daan or *Alms for the Blind Horse* is a Punjabi language film directed by Gurvinder Singh in 2011. It was his first feature film as a director and was funded by the NFDC (National Film Development Corporation). The film is based on a Punjabi novel by Gurdial Singh published in the 1970s. Since its release, it has won several international and Indian awards. It won the National award for Best Direction and Cinematography, and the Best Punjabi language film as well as the Golden Peacock at IFFI (International Film Festival of India) in Goa. It was also the first Punjabi film to premiere at the Venice film festival. Shot in and around the city of Bathinda in Punjab, it deals with the plight of the *Dalits*, of those on the margins, of the city and of the village. Subjugated and exploited, the characters silently but emphatically emanate restlessness, discontent and a simmering desire to rise up against oppression. Set in the bitter winter of Punjab, where the fog enshrouds the villagers, providing little comfort from the tyranny of Jat landlords, we are immersed in a world far removed from the bright yellow mustard fields often seen in Hindi cinema. Satya Rai Nagpaul's fantastic cinematography evokes the texture of melancholic and struggling lives. The style is reminiscent of Mani Kaul's, who was also the creative producer of the film. After his demise, the film is also a fitting tribute to his memory.

The film begins on a foggy winter morning when a Dalit family in a village in Punjab wakes up to the news of the demolition of a house of one of their community members on the outskirts of the village. The father, a silent sympathizer, joins his community to demand justice for the affected family. The same day, his son Melu, a cycle-rickshaw puller in the city, is participating in a strike by his union. Injured and alienated, Melu spends the day quietly resting and later joins his friends as they tease him over his state of affairs. Hesitantly, he drinks with them in the night as they debate the meaning of their existence. Cycling through the city streets, Melu feels lost and wonders where to go and what to do. Back in the village, his mother feels humiliated at the treatment meted out by the landlords in whose fields she works. Gunshots are heard in the night and the village is tense. It's the night of the lunar eclipse. A man wanders asking for the traditional alms while Melu's father decides to visit the city with a friend, even as his daughter Dayalo walks through the village streets at night.

Inform and content, *Anhey Ghode Da Daan* is not a typical regional Punjabi film. Most commercial contemporary Punjabi cinema revolves around the land-owning class of Jatts and themes of love, weddings or crude comedies. "The entire discourse, both political and cultural, now revolves around the Jatts", says Singh (Sharma, mid-day.com, 27-11-13). Regarding the form of the film, Singh did not know what it would look like until he began shooting it. The idea of short duration and rhythm of the actors emerged only when the shooting began. He tried casting in Chandigarh and Patiala but was unable to find any actor to his satisfaction. When they went to the village, he found his cast there. He says, "I wondered why we were wandering searching for actors. The village was the place the writer had written about. It was about them and they were enthusiastic."³ The entire crew of *Anhey Ghode Da Daan* included first-timers from the Line Producer to the sound recordists. Further, Singh had the confidence of working with non-actors because he had already

³(Personal interview, 17-10-13) wherever quoted unless mentioned otherwise

spent a lot of time with similar people in his travels around Punjab. He roamed around the village shooting on a small camera. The old man playing the father was chosen only a week before the shooting began. The actor was unable to read but surprisingly learned all the dialogues with the script in front of him by visually assigning the words to the sounds. The other actor was a union leader himself and had read the original novel.

Singh's creative process with the cinematographer Satya Rai Nagpaul was very intuitive. He wanted to exaggerate the feeling of winter. He says,

In the book, there is a pattern of the setting moving from pre-dawn tonight, fog, light breaking through, morning, winter sun, afternoon, evening...and so on. I wanted to show the evening light in the village opposed to the evening lights of the city. However, we soon realized that the night in the village had nothing, no street lights and very dim lighting in some places.

Thus, the form of the film emerged with the choices the director made while working with non-actors, shooting in their clothes, homes, real locations, and real winter. "The non-actor has to be able to transcend and enhance the quality of being the character. It also depends on how you feel at the moment of the shot, whether to hold it or not." Singh talks about the first shot of the film. In the melancholic sequence, the father wakes from sleep, long hair dishevelled early in the morning before the sun has risen. He asks his wife to make tea, wakes up and opens the door. The camera pans to an electricity spark on the right with the shadow of a kite falling on the door. Singh says, "We did not plan the sparking. It just happened and the choice to catch it was intuitive. You also see the kite dangling later in the afternoon." Another sequence establishes the socio-economic background of the villagers. We see a carpenter, wheat grinder, a tailor, the *jatt* card players and others who sit around doing nothing. These images were absorbed from the location itself. Further, Singh looks at the human face as a landscape to convey the discontent caused by the invisible power equation reflected on their faces. The characters drift in the social landscape of the Punjabi village and city from one event to another in the way Bordwell speaks about the art-film protagonist sliding passively from one situation to another (Bordwell, 1985: 214). "If the classical protagonist struggles, the drifting protagonist traces out an itinerary which surveys the film's social world" (ibid: 214).

Singh was also very keen on underexposure throughout the film. Nagpaul, on the other hand, was reluctant on how low he could go. Singh says, "I kept pushing him. And I was very happy with the interior night lighting of lamps and *choolas*." In the indoor sequence where the family eats their dinner of *saag* and *roti*, Singh debated on how dark he could go. Ultimately he found it impossible to achieve a feeling of almost darkness and had to be satisfied with Nagpaul's low lighting. There is also a lot of emphasis on off-screen action. The sound design was part of the shot-taking. "There was no question of embellishment with multiple track sound design. I think the thought of sound has to be there at the time of shooting", he says. For example, in the sequence of the father using the water hand pump, one could have taken shots from various angles and created a montage. "But I wanted to leave the image incomplete, with the sound giving it a completion", he says. So, one looks at a shot of the pout of the tap but there is no shot of his action of pumping. That action emerges from the sound of the pump, the action creating its presence through sound. This is found in many sequences of the film. Singh spoke to me about the experience created from formal explorations in cinema.

People tell me my film is formal. I wonder what that means. People also find it very emotional and cry during the experience. But formal exploration does not do that. Every construction is formal at a cerebral level, but form also has to transcend itself and lead to experience. I find that a lot of experimental work remains at the level of formal exercises. Even Mani Kaul thought so. I think that any person who expresses himself or herself for the first time

true to their nature gets labeled as experimental. I don't know if there is an experimental form as such. For Amrit Gangar non-narrativity is experimental. If it is about experientiality, then even commercial cinema is sensual in its own way. The intention of the filmmaker is important, whether he wants to be obtuse or easily understood.

Singh studied at FTII, Pune and initially found social realism ranging from Italian neo-realism to Ray easier to accept as a form. The first time he saw Mani Kaul's *Uski Roti* at the Institute, he was unable to appreciate it. He says, "We were left to ourselves to find out why one did not like a film, why it was important and why we are watching it. It's a double-edged sword. Later, I saw *Uski Roti* again and I felt awed." Singh ends up citing the waiting sequence of *Uski Roti* in his film as Melu's wife waits for a bus on the outskirts of the village. Singh's journey towards making *Anhey Ghode Da Daan* really began when he initially read the original novel written by Gurdial Singh. However, he had no reference or experience of Punjab having lived in Delhi all his life. The novel speaks about a class and section of people in the state who have no representation, itself an indirect reference to *Dalits* which Singh did not recognize at the time. Only when Singh took up a project of audio-visual documentation at FTII of *kissakaris* and alternate cult worshippers in Punjab, did he travel extensively around the state. After meeting the writer Gurdial Singh in Bathinda, Punjab, who was very supportive and encouraging, Singh asked him what he had in mind about the location that the novel is set in. He suggested the village of Sivian on the outskirts of Bathinda. The script was written in English and then translated into Punjabi. Singh knew that major production houses would not be interested in his film and applied to NFDC. He got selected, but their policy for a debutant director is to choose a mentor, for which he chose Mani Kaul. He says, "He wasn't actively involved but I could talk to him whenever I wanted. He did not get to see the film, unfortunately, because of his demise. But he would see the rushes which were sent to him on DVD."

Singh's first film was like a buildup of pent up energy waiting for a release. There were genuine social concerns in his film and it was not just a formal exercise. "I did not pick up the story for the sake of it. I associated with it." However, what was most heartening for Singh and what sums up his cinema very well was Gurdial Singh's response to his film. He told him, "After watching your film, I now understand the difference between literature and cinema. You did that on film what I could not do in the novel." The film was released in India through the PVR Rare initiative in select screens around the country – metros and few cities in Punjab. Singh thinks his film could have been better distributed and it got a good response only in Mumbai. Even in Punjab, it was not screened in Chandigarh, a city more receptive to the different cinema. Internationally, his film found a presence in the art world having played in a retrospective at MoMA, New York.

HARUD (2010)

Aamir Bashir grew up in Kashmir and left in 1990 to study in New Delhi before moving to Mumbai and working in the film industry as an actor. He was exposed to world cinema in Delhi's *Shakuntalam* theatre and is fond of watching the Turkish filmmaker Nuri Ceylan, Ray, Benegal, and Ghatak. For him, Kashmir is an important part of his filmmaking. He says, "Kashmir is a part of my identity and there is a compulsion to tell a story from there because they are few in number. The idea was to make what I want to make and whether it gets an audience is beyond me."⁴ His debut film as director, the very haunting *Harud* (2010) or *Autumn* was made with a budget of 1.5 Crore Rupees and it won the National Award for the Best Urdu language film that year. Bashir was excited about the idea for the story of *Harud* as long back as 2003. After struggling for a couple of years and talking to friends, he decided he wanted to write it with someone. With Shanker Raman, an FTII alumnus in cinematography as his co-writer, they started to write a story that was achievable in

⁴ (Personal interview, 21-07-13) wherever quoted unless mentioned otherwise

terms of shooting even if they had no producer. Bashir, who has acted in mainstream Hindi cinema, however, does not see himself as a filmmaker. The making of *Harud* was also about his identity of being a Kashmiri.

Harud tells the story of a Kashmiri youth Rafiq and his family who are struggling to come to terms with the loss of his older brother Tauqir, a tourist photographer, who is one of the thousands of young men who have disappeared since the onset of the militant insurgency in Kashmir. After an unsuccessful attempt to cross the border into Pakistan, to become a militant, Rafiq returns home to an aimless existence. Until one day, he accidentally finds his brother's old camera. According to some estimates, a large majority of the Kashmiri population is clinically depressed. This is an inevitable consequence of the violent conflict in the state symbolized by the character of Rafiq's father who slowly loses his mental balance in the second half of the film, just as Rafiq begins to find some hope. Autumn forms the thematic base of the film with the magnificent Chinar (Maple) tree as its leitmotif. There is a Kashmiri expression, "*Hardukzazur*", which can loosely be translated as autumnal decay. This slow decay symbolizes the Kashmiri psyche in the film. In terms of funding, *Harud* is independent since it is self-funded by Bashir and co-funded by Shanker Raman, his co-writer and cinematographer. Other friends also helped them raise initial money. The rough cut of the film was also sent to the Hubert Bals Fund of the International Film Festival of Rotterdam which funded the rest of the film.

Bashir and Raman decided to make the script as cinematic as possible. Earlier, Bashir engaged mostly with the dialogue form but later realized that there was an excess of talking. "I did not want to get into the mainstream space where the audience is spoon-fed", he says. The duo got a breakthrough when Raman visited Kashmir for the first time. Before, they had spoken about the characters in Mumbai, but when Raman saw them for himself in Kashmir and stayed there for a while, the ideas of time and space fell into place. Bashir says,

Earlier films based in Kashmir could have been placed anywhere, on any geographical location and had fixed ideas of good and bad. When we went there, the place started dictating the aesthetic.

The initial idea of Bashir for the film was to make it about technology and the introduction of mobile phones in the state. Bashir wanted to show a community waiting for technology and then finally getting access to it. This is treated in one sequence of the film. But the events of the film eventually became aspects of the mindscape of the Kashmiri people. After reaching the state and interacting with the families, they could sense something below the surface, an undercurrent to every conversation. This is an experience that Bashir believes changes everyone's opinion of Kashmir when they visit there. There is a sense of *Harud* being an inside-outside story with Bashir being an insider to Kashmiri life, and his co-writer and cinematographer Raman looking at it through his lens from the outside. Earlier they dabbled with the idea of making it a documentary, but Bashir decided that it had to be an insider's story. Hence, autumn as the season of decay is treated metaphorically to signify the decay of people's psychology as the after-effects of living in a state of constant oppression and violence. Rafiq, the youngster has a turnaround in his life, just like his father. It is only the mother who remains constant throughout the film. Bashir says,

I think it is the women in Kashmir who have kept families together. I wanted to explore the mental decay of people who live in a place known for its beauty, but now have to deal with everything that is not beautiful. What is the mindscape of people who have suffered for a long time?

To enter this mindscape, Bashir wants to engage the audience by going close to the character's face and staying there. Hence, it is not just a close-up, but the pace of a shot that delivers enough time for the viewer to engage with the

character and enter his or her head. The reason why Bashir made the film in Hindi and not Kashmiri was because he did not want it to be treated as a regional Kashmiri film. He thinks the Kashmiri language does not have an accessible standing in the hierarchies of regional language films and this would cause a hindrance in the theatrical release and a DVD release. The actors in the film are mostly non-actors except for the lead of the father played by Iranian actor Reza Naji. Bashir says, “We had to find someone who looked Kashmiri but had a weathered face exposed to the elements,” he says. They could not think of anyone in Mumbai and got in touch with Majid Majidi in Iran through a friend. Soon, Reza got back to them but they had to teach him the language through an interpreter and so it almost turned him into a non-actor.

The aesthetic of the film according to Bashir comes from the place during a specific time. For example, in the army search sequence of the bus involving the father and son during the opening moments of the film, the pace of the film was at its slowest. It brought out the agony and humiliation of being searched all the time and the identity of a people being questioned. On the ground, while shooting this sequence, the light was low and the police were not easily ready for the shoot. After having waited a long time, the place dictated the pace of the sequence, where the camera had to be fixed in one location observing the movement of the people being searched one by one in real time. Likewise, the first half of the film has a slower pace than the second when Rafiq’s life has a turnaround as he steps into his brother’s shoes. Likewise, the crew did not have any control over their surroundings during the ID parade sequence, again dictated by the presence of the army from whom the real reason for the shoot was withheld. Bashir says, “We didn’t want to make the film exotic with shawls, *shikaras*, *samovars*, etc and all those things associated with Kashmir in popular culture.” Bashir himself watches a lot of Iranian and Turkish cinema but does not consider them to be a conscious reference for the film in terms of form or color palette. What he wanted to show was the mental adaptation of people to violence. He says,

There was a time when violent incidents would happen every day in Kashmir but within minutes, normalcy would return. People adapt to anything. I wanted that to come across and the only way to identify with that is physically.

The cycling sequence early in the morning as a part of the newspaper distribution route brings Rafiq and the viewers to a fortified part of the city that signifies class difference, while the physical action of cycling displays his physical and mental struggles. “His breathing is life-affirming but also pulling him down,” says Bashir. Through the images of stone pelting at the beginning of the film, Bashir introduces familiar mediatized images of Kashmir to the audience. Through the familiar images, one is only able to gauge the bigger political narratives of India and Pakistan that are detached from the reality of the everyday that Bashir then goes on to explore in the rest of the film.

CONCLUSIONS

While the above filmmakers carry forward the spirit of the ‘experimental’ cinema of the New Wave through formal explorations of time, space and narration in cinema, the term is also found to be problematic by Gangar. “In a way, ‘experimental’ becomes problematic because the artist or the maker knows what he is doing and why” (Gangar, 2010:141). Gangar prefers to use the term *cinema of prayoga* which signifies for him deep and abstract meditation stemming from the word *yog* (141). He wants to give prominence to the idea of chance and the unexpected discovery of a relationship between images, also reflected in the articulations of the directors discussed who themselves give importance to intuition.

The Film Institute in Pune has groomed generations of students in global art cinema and created a unique kind of cinephilia among them before the advent of DVDs and internet downloads and other cinema forums. Cinephilia, however, has not remained within the domain of film schools only and increasingly finds itself growing with easier access to film

knowledge and cinema on the internet. Cinephilia, when it emerged in France was characterized by the element of scarcity. For Mark Vernet, “The cinema was like a series of phantoms the cinephile was trying to capture at out-of-the-way venues, at odd hours or at distant festivals” (cited in Ghosh, 2010:5). In a similar vein, cinephile audiences in India have scoured avenues to watch the above filmmakers just as the filmmakers have done the same for viewing the masters of cinema. The films discussed above are a projection of this education and the filmmaker’s trials with the visual form that tags them as ‘experimental’ which is a term they don’t enjoy being tagged with., I argue, that the term itself cannot be defined in terms of any fixed genre or category. Their form has evolved from their locations, memory and a will to explore cinematic possibilities. There are no definitive endings or classical character arcs. Bordwell suggests that art film narration “knows that life is more complex than art can ever be, and – a new twist of the realistic screw – the only way to respect this complexity is to leave causes dangling and questions unanswered” (1985: 217). The play with time, space and rhythm blending with narratives of social realities in the films I have discussed in this paper has attracted them a niche following and makes them pioneers in the cinematic arts as well.

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